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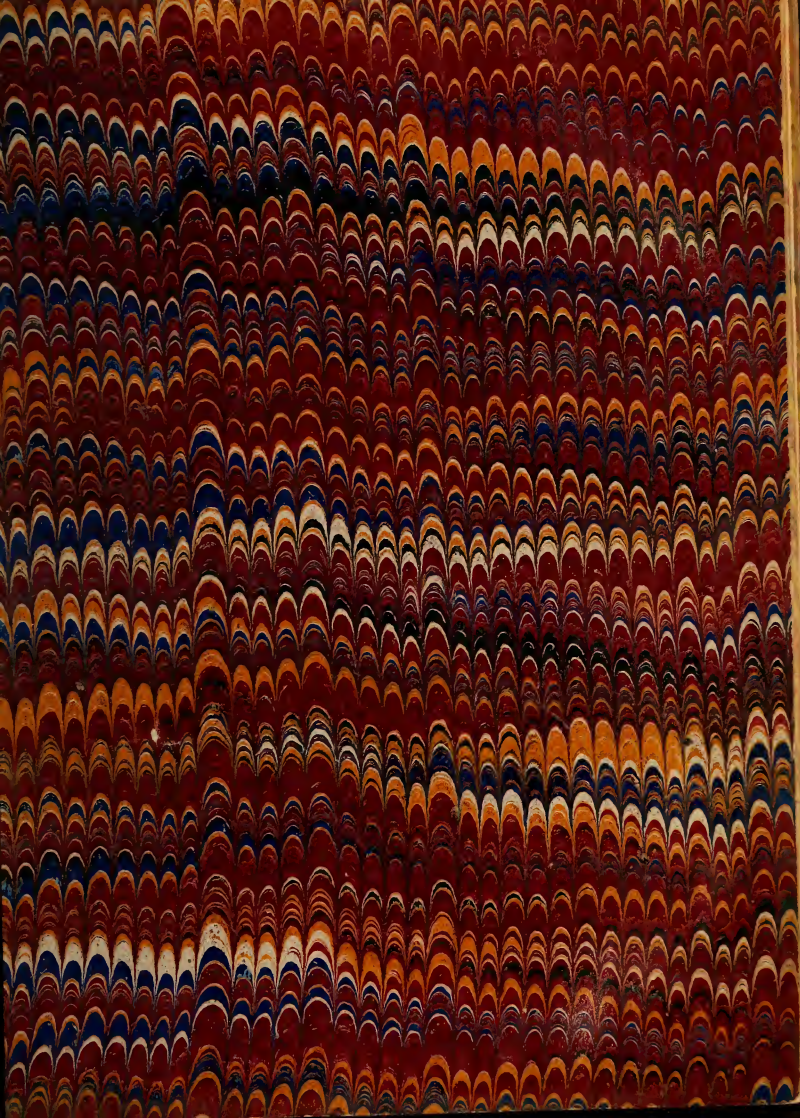
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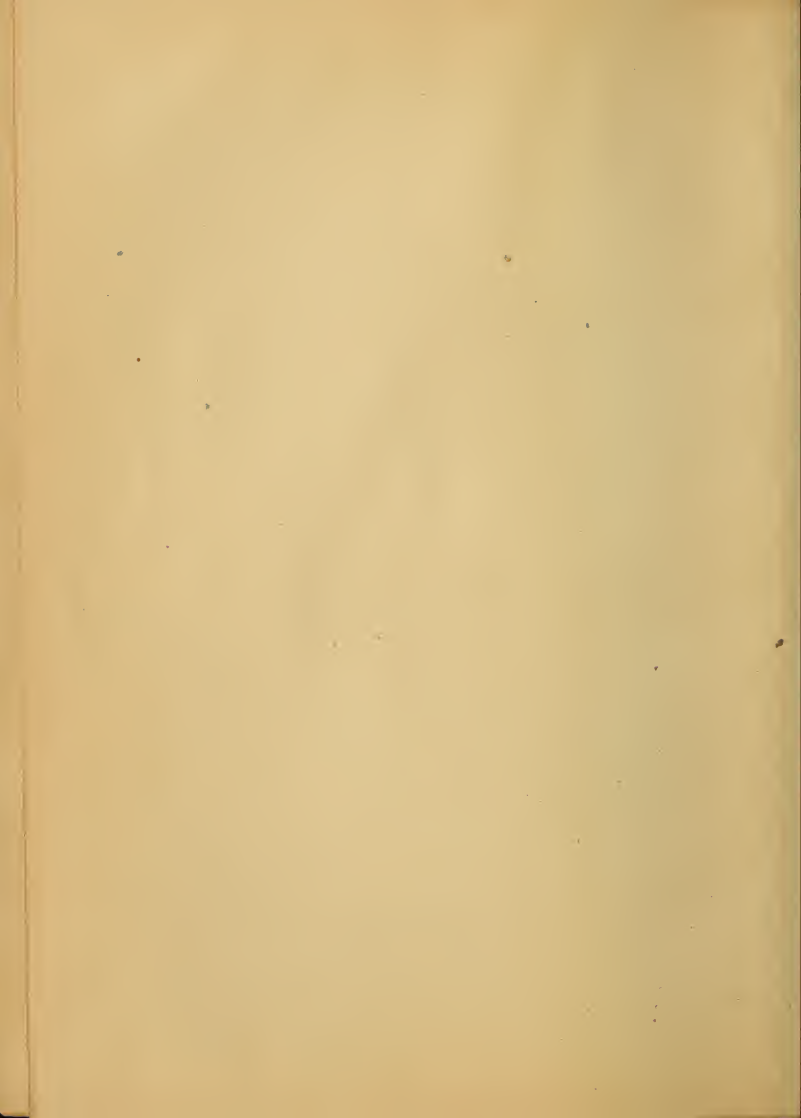
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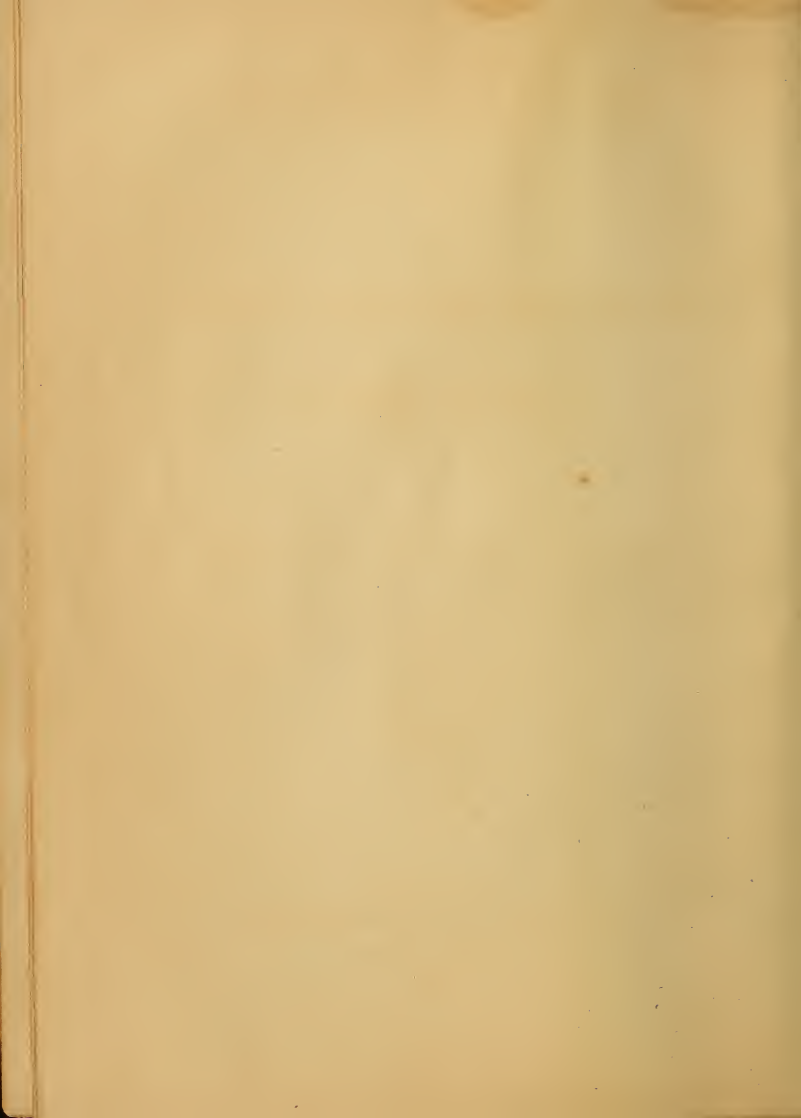
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STEPS TO A LIVING FAITH:

BEING

Letters to an Indifferent Believer.

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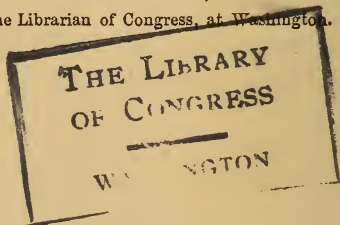
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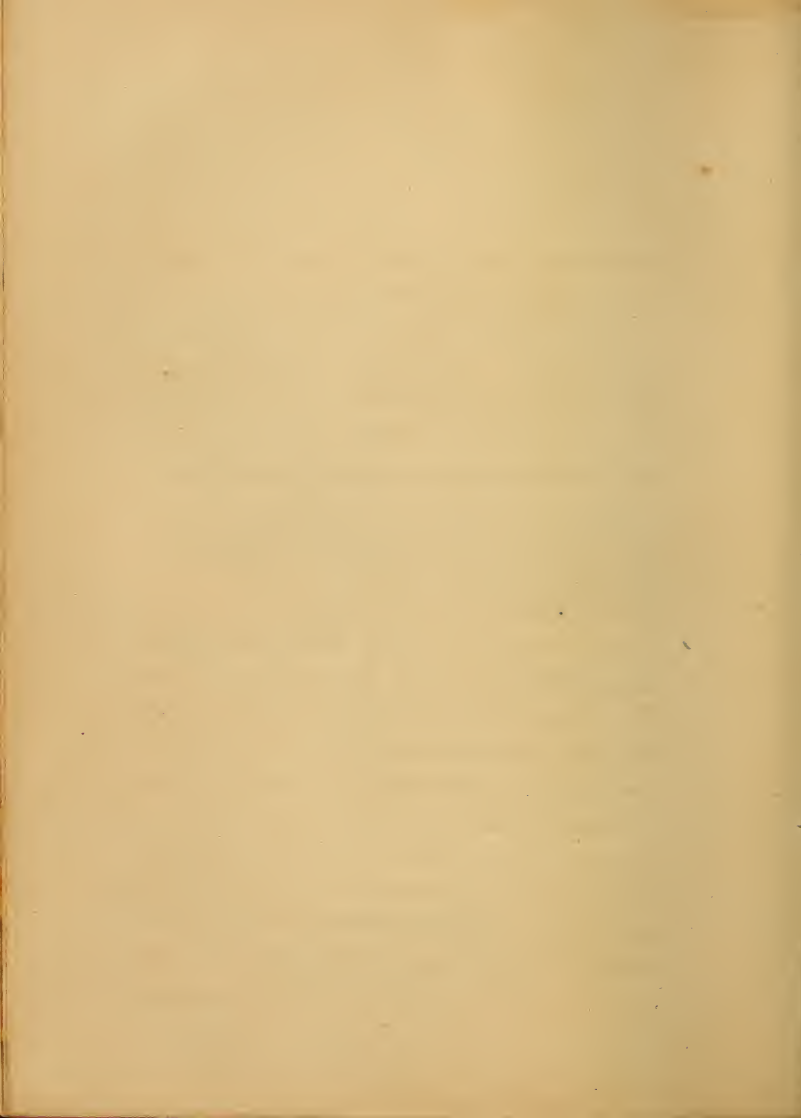
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THESE letters were written to meet an actual inquiry. It has been thought that they might be of some further service if transferred from the periodical — “The Churchman” — where they were first printed, to a pamphlet by themselves. This does not relieve me of the responsibility of the present publication, but it accounts for it.

F. D. HUNTINGTON.

SYRACUSE,

Feast of the Conversion of St. Paul, 1873.



STEPS FROM A LIFELESS BELIEF TO A LIVING FAITH:

BEING

LETTERS TO AN INDIFFERENT BELIEVER.



LETTER I.

MY DEAR FRIEND: You ask counsel because you need help. According to your own account, the state of your mind is this: Intellectually, but no farther, you accept the Christian Revelation. Perhaps it would be more strictly accurate to say that you *do not deny* its truth, because you see no valid reasons for denying it, or because you are not able to produce such reasons. It is rather a passive than an active assent. You are not disposed and not able to dispute the historical facts recorded in the Christian Scriptures. You understand that for nearly eighteen hun-

dred years the Record of those facts has been lying in the full view of the sharpest critics and most thorough scholars of the successive generations ; that, from various motives, many gifted and learned men, all along, have done their best to discover defects in that record, or to break up the evidence of its authenticity, by every line of argument that you are able to conceive of ; that to argument they have often added ridicule, satire, and abuse, in their keenest and most fascinating forms ; and yet that none of these strenuous efforts of unbelief, whether springing from pride, ambition, impatience of religious restraint, or the passion for independent investigation, have been able to make a very profound or lasting impression on the general conviction of the reading and thinking world that what is related in the New Testament is true. All that has been adduced by way of objection has been fairly met and answered by students, who have devoted their lives impartially to the inquiry.

You also understand that the men who wrote these Scriptures, for the most part certainly, had the best possible opportunity, as eye-witnesses or otherwise, to know whether what they declared was true or not; that many of them were subjected to every kind of test and trial in their testimony, and suffered every kind of loss, agony, persecution, even to exile and martyrdom, for the sake of it; that they lived consistent and pure lives, and were evidently made more upright, charitable, and devout, by what they believed and reported. All this you are ready to admit.

Furthermore, seeing that these Scriptures contain certain teachings or doctrines, as well as narratives and statements of fact, and that the facts are the basis of the doctrines, and that the history is so interwoven with the moral and spiritual instruction that they cannot be taken apart without utterly destroying the integrity and sense of the writing, you are not prepared to reject the teachings themselves.

Some of them are plainer and easier to receive than others; some require explanation; some deal with matters that are mysterious; some are in debate among Christians. But you have learned that this is what might be naturally expected from the character of the subjects touched, from the circumstance that the text of the Sacred Books has passed through a process of translation by which shades of meaning are modified, and from the confessed tendency of the human mind to put constructions on language suiting it to its own preconceived ideas or preferences. You are obliged to acknowledge that, in spite of all differences and all obscurities, there is a body of well-ascertained and generally received religious doctrine taught in the Bible. It is so received by a vast majority of those who have been in sympathy with the spirit of the Revelation, who have sought its real signification with docility, and have made a cheerful obedience to its practical requirements one of the guiding lights to its interpretation.

Drawing an obvious distinction between those things in the subject-matter which are essential to its life, as well as essential to constitute a Christian in belief and character, and certain other things contained which are not so essential — a distinction clearly made out within the Revelation itself — you acknowledge that there is as good an agreement respecting the former as could be reasonably expected, considering the nature of religion as a spiritual reality, and considering the imperfection of words as a medium of communication. Moreover, you are aware that in certain great, ancient, and powerful Christian organizations, claiming to have a common origin and a common interior life — claiming to be able to demonstrate an unbroken historical existence from the beginning, with invariable marks of identification, and therefore pronounced branches of one Church, there has come down, from the earliest Christian age, a Declaration or summary, in two concordant shapes, of these very facts and

doctrines — the essential matter of the Faith: the Creed of the Apostles.

Again you observe an inseparable connection between the prevalence of this Faith and the welfare of our Race. In all human history since Christ came, civilization and Christianity are found together. The first never exists in its highest form without the second. The second never exerts its peculiar power freely, without producing the first. There were forms of society before Christ came, and outside of Judea, where the intellectual arts reached a rare measure of cultivation. So we sometimes speak of a Phœnician or a Greek civilization. But the term is relative. No other civilization deserves a moment's comparison with the Christian. As soon as Christianity *prevailed* anywhere, a new and higher social type was manifested. No ideal of human excellence has transcended the Christian standard. No heroism has been more glorious, no kind of moral dignity more majestic, no domestic virtue more chaste, no mer-

cantile honor more immaculate, than the Christian ethics demand. It has everywhere been put beyond cavil by experiment, that mankind are every way better for the Gospel.

Go where you will and make up a catalogue of those attributes or qualities which belong to the higher social state, you discover, on comparison, that they are the very same which are emphatically enjoined in the New Testament, and that they actually appear in the world in proportion as the entire Christian morality, propagated and supported by the ordinances of the Gospel, penetrates the private life and controls the public action of the people. You are not blind to the logical inferences from this recognized law, or to the immense confirmation it lends to the claims of Revelation.

This, then, is your attitude. Intellectually you are a Christian ; because nothing in your intellect, on the whole, denies the religion of Christ. Negatively you are a Christian ; your adherence to

this religion, if it can be called such, consists rather in not denying, than in positively embracing and asserting it. Passively and nominally you are a Christian ; because, while belonging to a nation or community called Christian, you offer no conscious or intentional opposition to this religion : though you neither avow personal allegiance to it, nor make any resolute endeavor to promote or establish it. You are not an infidel, or even a skeptic. You are not an atheist, because you believe in God. You are not a pantheist, because you believe God to be a person. You are not a rationalist, because, when you reflect, you acknowledge an authority in Religion above your own or any human reason. If you reckon yourself in with any ecclesiastical or denominational body it is still only speculatively that you belong to it, because your preference leads to no practical result, and tastes are not convictions.

You may hang loosely upon a religious society, but are not joined vitally to any.

You are not quite certain, I think, whether you were brought by the faith of others, as a child, into a covenant relation with the Body of Christ, in the Sacrament of Baptism, or not; you are not concerned about that; if you were so brought to baptism, you have taken no heed of the relation, and have done nothing to prove yourself a “very member incorporate” in the Body.

Owing to some instincts that you have never taken the trouble to account for, or some traditional notions that render the Christian name respectable, you would resent it as a wrong, possibly as an affront, if you should be refused that name, *Christian*. But you do not pretend that the amount of your title to it is more than I have represented.

I have taken pains to mark out your position in these respects somewhat more fully than you have done it in the few intimations you have given me, with a particular object. It is important to any right use of what is to follow that we note

with equal care what you receive, or concede, of the system of Divine Truth, and what you do not. I am especially desirous to have it understood that your difficulties are not those of an absolute unbeliever.

Let no reader of these papers suppose that what has here been said, incidentally, of the proofs of Revelation, is intended as a formal answer to those that deny its truth. I have only alluded to two or three lines of the manifold argument. It is sadly true that the class of doubters is large, nor is it difficult to detect the causes of its recent increase. Many of these skeptics are but very superficially acquainted with the real grounds of the Christian belief. The neglect of Christian history, in our systems of education, has long been amazing. We are beginning to see that it is disastrous.

What is needed as much, perhaps, as anything for the arrest of speculative unbelief, is an appreciation of our Religion in

its historical character. That is, Christianity is a matter of fact. A notion extensively prevails that it is entirely or chiefly a matter of opinions, sentiments, feelings, interior states, or else of abstract principles. The vast importance of all these in relation to practical results and personal conduct is not to be overlooked. The end of Christianity is character; the production in man of that likeness to Christ which is the supreme manifestation on the earth of the glory of God. There the divine and human elements meet in their intended reconciliation; the Incarnation becomes a perpetual redeeming power; with the second Adam is a new creation. But there is a popular confusion of ideas as respects two closely related and yet actually different things; namely, the Christianity of personal character on the one hand, and, on the other, Christianity as a tangible reality outside of our personality, a whole body of facts organically wrought together and ascertained as any other facts are ascertained, an ob-

jective, solid substance, an institution of God, a visible and definable thing that He has given to men and set up on the earth. We can look at it, study it, identify it; it must be accounted for, for there it is. If we think we can account for it without Revelation, or in any other way than that which Revelation opens, why, we can try it. Some men have tried; with what success you know. But if we put all this body of historical facts out of view, and undertake to conceive of Christianity as wholly a matter of internal states, or individual ideas, it is obvious that there can be no certainty, no definiteness, no fixedness, no standard or criterion, about it. Some will agree about it, and some will differ. Logically there may be as many Christianities as there are individuals. All those internal states, dispositions, principles, that make up a Christ-like character, are the *fruit* of that revealed, embodied Christianity of facts, opening out from God, containing a law of authority and a life-giving energy, originating in

Jesus Christ born of Mary, "the Word made flesh," and disclosed in divine beauty through Him to the eyes and hearts of mankind. Around his person, and stretching down the ages from the track He trod and the cross where He died, is a broad and luminous belt of kindred, clearly attested verities, further facts, but all of them parts of one Whole. Were our religion to be approached more generally under this representation, it is probable that multitudes would take a new kind of interest in it, that many loose and fluctuating notions respecting it would be replaced by a settled confidence, and that to these multitudes the expressions "Kingdom of Heaven" and "Church of God" would take on a new significance. Errors of opinion would be found to have been thrust into association with these facts by mortal hands; but they would also be found to be separable, because the tests of facts, including the original Records, the historical events, and the visible institutions are so much simpler

and more satisfactory than the tests of mere speculation.

There are three classes of unbelievers :

1. Unbelievers who are so from a natural slowness and hardness to believe ; constitutional doubters, congenital Thomases, — who have taken little trouble to be rid of their defect, and so suffer a continual loss of faith and peace.
2. Unbelievers from other men's misrepresentations of the Faith, from false education, from the sincere blunders of mistaken theologians, and from the bad lives and small graces of avowed but inconsistent believers.
3. Unbelievers from taste and choice, from the conceit of being sharper and wiser than the ages, from an ambition to sit in the pride of individual judgment on Bible, Church, and all other authority, — unbelievers having in them the spirit and temper of doubt and a relish of denial. You are not, I assume, to be reckoned in with either of these classes. Yet your position is not so far removed from the skeptic's, or so secure

against sliding into it, as to make it unsuitable for me to remind you that for every one of these sorts of skepticism there are remedies, ready for use. Be assured, that for a thorough defense of the Faith against each and all of the various forms of unbelief, ancient or modern — and the modern are not so very unlike the ancient as you may have been led to imagine — the Church, in her scholarship and her dialectics, feels entirely armed. Not all her champions are thus armed. There are honest contestants among them who know but little of the enemy's real positions, little of the real strength of their own cause ; who have never had occasion for the terrible encounter in their own souls, and have not studied profoundly the laws of the warfare elsewhere. Understand, however, that to the skeptic the Church has something to say about skepticism. I have been acquainted with a great many doubters, and I am obliged in truth to say but very few of them, continuing doubters, have been willing to un-

dertake to satisfy their minds by what I should call a fair and reasonable amount of careful reading, of the right kind, on the Christian side. There would be little difficulty in naming two or three affirmative works in Christian literature on each department of modern unbelief which would be acknowledged in any court of Letters to deserve the highest intellectual respect ; and they are such works that till they or their equivalents have been read, no man has an intellectual or moral right to determine in favor of disbelief. It would be well if, instead of jumping to the conclusion that their doubts are insoluble, minds that are tending to unbelief would apply to some competent authority for information. At present we are on a different field.

Nor is the class of minds small to which you, my dear friend, belong. You will readily perceive that, though I am addressing myself to an individual inquirer, and would gladly do as much if you were all alone in your difficulties, yet I cannot

be unmindful that there is scarcely a congregation or hamlet in the land where scores of men and women are not to be found who, if they were as candid as you are, would confess to the same religious dissatisfaction. In fact, I suppose that it is precisely these difficulties which at this moment create one of the most formidable obstacles to the spiritual power of Christ's Church and Gospel. Praise be to God that here and there a frank, thoughtful mind is moved to own the first, faintest movements of the Spirit, and seek the way of life ! You may be sure you will not be chided or discouraged by any true follower of that Christ, our only Saviour, who treated with wonderful love every sincere seeker of his friendship. I promise you as tender a sympathy in your troubles as one burdened, tempted heart can feel for another. Above all, do not forget that however cordially and earnestly we may strive to help one another, our first and final help is in God alone, and that simple, direct,

special prayer to Him is the surest path to the light.

What, then, in a word, is your complaint? You are not, on your own showing, a true disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ, in will, in heart, in life. Something is wanting at the very root. You are conscious of it. Let us start at that point, then, where the Spirit of God has brought you.

LETTER II.

THE WANT. — ORIGIN OF THE FEELING.

MY DEAR FRIEND : In our consciousness, a Christian life begins in a sense of want. We must be dissatisfied with what we have, and with ourselves as we are, before we shall go in search of a better part, or aspire to a loftier estate. The Saviour appeals first to a feeling of the need of being saved. Self-contentment, if such a degree of stupidity can be said to exist at all in a moral nature, is the most discouraging of conditions. There is no power of spiritual quickening in it. Neither the sensibilities nor the activities of life are born of death ; and to be absolutely self-approved is to be dead. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us ; and the absence of truth from the

spiritual world is what the obscuration of light is to the physical. If you thought yourself well enough off as you are, you would not have sought for more light; and it would be hard work to feel much esteem for your manhood. You should be thankful that you are in some measure unhappy.

I remind you, observe, of what takes place in the *consciousness* of man. About the processes of the Divine Spirit there is a deeper mystery. We know, however, by his own plain declarations, that He moves upon the heart according to the heart's own spiritual constitution, in conformity with its laws, and in the ways of an everlasting order. Not only has He had a personal concern for you, separating you, in the gentle thoughts of his loving-kindness, from all other souls that ever lived, ever since you were born, but the preparations of his grace were made for you before you began to be. The Lord "loved us before we loved Him." St. Paul struck down among those pro-

founder things where our modern meditations seldom drop their plummet, when he said, "According as He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world." Concurrently with the course of our natural, ordinary existence, the purpose of this heavenly affection has been patiently working. It has been ever pressing towards us, seeking tenderly to attract us to Himself, and to fashion us into his likeness, taking advantage of every turn in the stream of life, besetting us behind and before, "following," and "preventing," marvelously turning ordinary events, little and great, into instruments of this *definite design*, and often coming upon us in providences so signal, in their evident intention to make us understand his meaning, that, in our imperfect discernment of the whole plan, we call them "special." Run your eye back along your past years, and candidly tell yourself whether you cannot see traces of such an assiduous goodness, a "besetting God." It will be strange if you do not then in-

quire of yourself what this signifies, and what you owe for it. Whether you do or not, the Grace works on, as it has from the first, infinite, unwearied, trying to fashion the poor frivolous thing, that you call your life, into the glory that is possible for it. One of Christ's most earnest efforts has been to stir up in you the sense of need which you are now willing to confess. The Spirit works within us not only "to do" but "to will," and to feel that unless we do so "will" we die.

Searching closely, we find that this grace has an outward as well as an inward economy. Operating immediately on the soul, it operates also mediately through the fixed channels, the conducting ordinances, the life-conveying sacraments of a mediatorial system. St. Augustine and others call them "life-giving" sacraments; and so they are; but we must take care not to hide the original Giver, or confound even the stream of living water with the hand of Love that pours it. All the parts of this gracious system

are organically related to one another, being fitly joined together, compacted and articulated, each member nourished and the whole body continually enlarging by that which every joint supplieth. Jesus Christ is the head of this complete, twofold, living organization. His incarnation is at once the source and the type of the entire constitution, every department and organ of it being constructed on the pattern and warrant of the Heavenly Life and Grace taking a visible form in "the Word made Flesh." You cannot afford to despise the office of these mediate agents, in both awakening and filling your spiritual wants. Their sanction is in the mediatorship of the Son of God, — God's unseen life becoming visible and tangible, in order to impart itself to an indifferent world. Your attention may not have been much directed to them in this higher character; for between a false spiritualistic philosophy on the one hand, and an engrossing materialism on the other, their Divine appointment has

been well-nigh forgotten, and accordingly much of our piety has become ghost-like, and our living carnal. But as you come to regard them in this pure evangelic light, as the first Christians did, they will put on an inexpressible beauty. You will see that God has dealt with us in the simplest way, on the most natural terms, taking us body and spirit, just as we are, and not proposing to put asunder in religion what He has joined together everywhere else. He reaches the unseen springs of penitence and prayer by a pathway not entirely invisible to sense. No matter how jealous you may be of attributing too much efficacy to external forms, you must acknowledge that nearly all those impressions that you consider as coming directly from the Spirit into the heart, are found, after all, to be borne in by some outward vehicle, or instrumentality — a written text, a word spoken, a sight seen, a sorrow overtaking, an event occurring. Besides, among impressions that are wholly without regulation,

or law, or criterion, you know that a great many run to extravagance, fanaticism, self-conceit, and religious absurdity. If I am not mistaken, you have sometimes laid off the responsibility of your own indifference upon the disgust and reaction occasioned by that sort of sentimentalism. "There is one Spirit and one Body." You will discover here a very merciful adaptation to our practical necessities. That of itself will invest the subject with fresh interest, I think, and will perhaps wake up a new desire to go further, and will help you to feel that St. Paul was right in calling the Christian discipleship a "reasonable service." Indeed, you will begin to wonder, I suspect, that you have not sooner recognized this twofold working of the Spirit in all parts of the Bible, as well as in the history of the Church.

I have referred particularly to it here on account of its connection with the sense of want, which is the beginning of conscious Christianity in the soul. You find the want making itself felt. But

does it make itself felt? There was no such motive force there. You did not call it into being. It came. You felt it. It was present by no act of your will. Whence was it? Suppose you were brought, in the obedience of faith, in childhood, into the sacramental covenant of baptism, then this waking up of a desire after your true inheritance, this feeling after God — if haply you may find Him — is a part of the fulfillment of his baptismal promise, which He was “sure to keep and perform.” The germ is springing after all. Seeds sprout that have been lying buried long. It was not an empty form. The water was not in vain, because the Spirit, and a pledge of the Spirit, and a sponsorial faith and prayer, were with it. How could it be in vain? Whatever you may desire to do with this awakened want, be sure it is a part of your Father’s faithfulness to you, and will take its place as a witness for his affection. If you were not brought into the Body sacramentally, then you

have only to be thankful for a yet more abundant grace. Your Lord has done *more* than He promised. The river has overflowed its banks to reach your lips. Beyond what you have had reason to expect or claim, not being under the covenant, you are visited and touched by the boundless Compassion that would not leave even the Gentile without some witness. You have still to say, -

“’Tis mercy all that thou hast brought
My mind to seek her peace in thee.”

The connection, however, even then, between this gracious experience in your religious history and the initiatory sacrament is not, by any means, dissolved, as we shall see. What in the one case came after, in the other comes before. As the salvation before Christ came was still Christian salvation, so all the movements of the Spirit of the Saviour on the heart bear a secret relation to the revealed kingdom and its laws. As will appear, Christian grace is not complete till you are a branch on the Vine, a member in

the Body. You cannot too firmly believe that all the spiritual influences and powers which play through our human life emanate from the person of Christ, and that all spiritual help for us centres there. The Comforter testifies of Him. It will assist you greatly if you can join with this faith a hearty conviction that the only religious progress you can hope to make will not be independent of the worship, the ordinances, the rites, the visible order of the Kingdom.

At any rate, recognize in yourself, first of all, this feeling of something wanting, this restless sense of need. However it came, however you may think it came, by whatever untraceable course it found its way, take it very humbly and gratefully as a gift of your God. Do not despise it because it is feeble. Do not distrust it because it is not constant, or not constantly remembered. You do not know what boundless blessings may come in its train. Treat it rightly, and it may be the germ of infinite gain, of a

harvest of vigorous virtues. Reverence your self-discontent. Taking you just as you are, it is the healthiest symptom of your soul : the finest thing in you. You are not satisfied with yourself, religiously, as a man, living in Christendom. Act accordingly and acknowledge it. No manlier thing have you ever done. Kneel down, like a child, like a man, at once, and thank God that you have done it. A vague dissatisfaction, a disturbed feeling of being generally wrong, of being out of the best way, is not the same thing with a sense of the need of God. Many men know that they want something, and something quite different from all that they have or are seeking, but do not know what they want. And yet these two states are meant to be links in one chain. There is a step between them — a step that too many never take ; for it is sadly true that there is no spot along the whole line, from the swine-herd of the far country to the Father's house, where some weak feet have not halted. The Spirit has done his first salutary work

when He has made us uneasy in ourselves and uneasy with the world. What tragedies, and famines, and slaughters, might have been escaped, if restless multitudes, feeling the pain, had not from pride, or eagerness of appetite, or fatal delay, attempted to bury it or narcotize it, instead of listening to it! What it requires is an interpreter of its solemn voice, and a readiness to follow it as the prophet of a better future. Many a soul that finally came to cry out for the living God, as the hart panteth after the water brooks, could only say at first that it was "athirst." The benediction of the beatitude falls, to be sure, only on those who hunger and thirst *after righteousness*; and it is worth your notice that all the blessings pronounced before that one, are promised to simply receptive states, emptied of self,—poverty of spirit, sorrow, humility. Yet those hearts are not far from the blessing which have found out that the world's cisterns are broken. Our next step will be to look more closely at the *nature* of this want.

LETTER III.

THE NATURE OF THE WANT.

MY DEAR FRIEND: A sense of spiritual need being the beginning of spiritual action, and necessary to both repentance and faith, the stirring up of that sense becomes, as we have seen, the first effort of Divine Love in the soul. Here are the model and rule for human ministrations. In dealing with ourselves, or with one another, if we aim at deep work, or thorough results, we must go bravely and honestly at this mark. Preëminently it is the prophet's business. Men in earnest will not shrink from the awful office — stern, searching, incisive, painful, and therefore very often unwelcome, but merciful with the far-sighted mercy which regards the true peace beyond the transient pain. You notice it in all those parents,

disciplinarians, spiritual masters and pastors, who know the difference between affection and fondness, between kindness and indulgence. The great workmen for God have wrought straightforward in the mystery of this higher faith and charity, willing to hurt when they were sure thereby to bless. The preachers of grandest success, in all periods, have been those that had most skill and power in making their hearers uncomfortable in the knowledge of themselves, and discontented with their past lives. Hence the terrible severity of those rebukes, in Holy Scripture, that fall on messengers who deliver to the people the message the people wish and are delighted, in their low-toned life, to hear, instead of the message given them when they were sent. Smooth prophesyings are lying prophesyings. When apathy is the disease, and drowsiness the symptom, soft sayings are the hardest in their cruelty. Not that the sense of want is kindled always in one style, or always in direct terms, or by always technically

talking to men as impenitent sinners. Pulpits that have made this their only way are responsible for a miserable mass of callous consciences. But be the method what it will, the first object is the same — the creation of a conscious hunger. Some by hearing the plainest invective, some by an acute analysis of the interior morbid condition, some by the uncovering of their delusions, some by the wholesome stimulation of the better powers till they put the worse to shame, some by being made to look at lofty standards and pure ideals in contrast with their meanness and selfishness, yet all alike must come to feel and confess that they are empty till the Lord's hand fills them. They are the strong and happy souls which take the truth of God on these rugged terms, not counting the truth-teller their enemy, not impatient of faithfully-reproving lips, not shrinking from the humiliating discovery that they are Laodiceans, poor, and blind, and naked. It is nothing less than everlasting life, my friend, that you want.

You can afford some wretchedness and homesickness for that. Be encouraged that you have found out enough of what you lack to put you out of ease, starting in you a quarrel with your indifference. You say that you have too little sense of sin. No doubt you have. But how did you happen to say it? Unless you are utterly insincere, as I do not believe you are, your very saying of that is a sign of hope, a token that a new life is generated and quickened, a faint ray of morning light on the cloud in the East.

When our Lord, in his personal ministry, came to an indifferent world, he sought primarily to convict it of just this defect, to make it conscious of its indifference. From the Record we learn the wondrous fact that, to a large extent, He did this as no other teacher ever did, by simply showing himself, in the Divine tenderness of his benignity and the beauty of his holiness, to the eyes of men. His mere presence, by the marvelous power which absolute goodness exerts

over evil, smote the persons He met with a kind of self-condemnation. They looked upon Him, and a strange self-revelation flashed through their natures. Instantly, and as it were in spite of themselves, they stood in new relations to themselves, to their fellow-men, to God, and to judgment, because He was there. They can throw off this silent grasp upon their consciences only by going away and plunging back into the old superficial life. A thoroughbred Pharisee was equal to that policy. A few, of simpler habits, men of more open spirit, women whose tears were not all burnt out of their fountains, looked into the Heavenly face, listened to the Heavenly voice, and knew that they needed Him. For awhile this seems to have been all that they knew. It drew them to Him. As they went on it bound them to Him. They said to themselves, "This stranger can give me all I want." They were not instructed yet. There was no explanation. The august opening of the mysteries of the Gospel of the King-

dom was not yet begun, by one parable, beatitude, miracle, or prediction. Men were made disciples by another evangelization, by a secret waking up of self-contempt and self-renunciation, by the heart's hunger, and a sufficing assurance that He would fill it. The latter part of the first chapter of St. John's Gospel illustrates this, in the details of such a following of a new-comer as never was before or since. John the Baptist had said a few half-understood words of the Nazarene as a Lamb of God, to take away sin; an imperfect preaching of the Cross. But He in whom the power and glory of the Cross lay was there. That was enough. He said, "Come;" and men came. It was an easy matter to throw away fishing-nets, boats, a tax-gatherer's table, and to leave houses, and livelihood, and everything held most precious to that hour. The feeling of want arose in its mighty mastery, because He in whom "all the fullness dwelt bodily" stood manifest. When He went on to teach and preach,

it was only a more articulate expression of the same influence. He took up the Baptist's cry "Repent," a word of kindred import to the "Turn ye" of the older prophets. By the well of Samaria the guilty woman had her hidden thirst interpreted to her under the image of the well-water. Any sudden disclosure of his Divinity evidently had the same penetrating and convicting effect as his language. At a merciful miracle which, we might have thought, would only have made the witnesses complacently thankful, St. Peter exclaimed, "I am a sinful man," — not good enough for this Presence, — "Depart from me;" and when the same apostle, a primate of penitence though not of prerogative, afterward took up his missionary calling and preached the first and pattern sermon at Pentecost, the burden of it was, "Behold your Saviour, whom you have crucified, and let the sight of Him make you repent, drive you to your baptismal washing, and through faith to life." In the personal

revelation of Jesus, all that was bad in men became visibly and confessedly bad ; yet this conviction became not a force of despair, but rather an inspiration of hope ; because at the same moment all capacities of good sprang into confident vigor under his eye, and along with the feeling of spiritual need there came, in Him, the infinite and inexhaustible and free supply, — “ the Lord our Righteousness.”

Proceeding now to analyze this general sense of spiritual need, you find it has several elements. In actual experience, these may make themselves felt in different individuals with different degrees of power ; one of them may sting this heart, and another that ; but they all belong to the beginnings of the conscious life of God in the soul.

1. First is the want of being at one with God. I doubt if a single soul, when the faintest rudiments of Gospel truth have once been presented, can be found wholly devoid of a feeling of uneasiness so long as it is alien from God, and because

of that alienation. All that is necessary to it is a belief that there is a God. Once let that idea enter and lodge itself in your mind — and with most men it enters by a door that no mortal hand opened — and ever afterward a shadow of fear pursues you till you know that you and God are friends with one another. The shadow may be slight, fugitive, making scarcely a deeper impression than the shade of a thin, white cloud on the mountain side across which it flies in the flood of noon. But it comes and comes again, and again, and always there is some questioning, some misgiving, some little check of the blood, or shrinking of joy. Give it a voice, a chance to speak, and it would say, “All is not right between me and God.” Peace is disturbed. There is a twinge of pain. This God is almighty: then it cannot be safe to be estranged from Him. He made the world and us. Can it be well for us to live on as if there were no such Being? He is the Judge: What is his judgment of me? He is lov-

What does it mean that I have no love for Him? His love holds me in on every side: What must come of it, if I go on just shutting my eyes to it, and trying to forget it? Unquestionably there are expedients enough to help you in that mad forgetting. The world is a curiosity-shop brimful of them; the flesh promptly furnishes them through five avenues; the devil makes it his obliging business to pass them on in their most fascinating shapes and colors. But what of all this? Your soul's divine instinct is mightier than all of them. Your soul aches under its alienation. It cannot rest till it looks up with clear eyes, and is sure that it is on the side of God—that between itself and God there is no separation.

2. Attending this want of oneness with the Heavenly Father, and so near to it, as practically to be a part of it, is the want of a special reconciliation. There is a secret feeling that all this restless sense of alienation and boding fear may be gone, and become a thing of the

past, remembered only as an ugly dream. Call it an intuition, or an operation of the Spirit that strives with man, or a conviction let in upon you at some time by the Word of Life, no matter now what your account of it is. You reckon yourself a "believer." I am not anxious to inquire the amount of your belief. It is enough to keep alive in you, or else to press back often upon you, a conviction that there is such a thing as an act of Reconciliation, definite and effectual, and that it carries an estranged soul over at once into that blessed state of friendship and peace. You have heard of it as known by experience to thousands in the Church. You believe in it, as possible for you. A conscious need of being "at one" with God would be only a tantalizing torment, unless there were a reality of at-one-ment answering to it. The one want passes into the other. You need not puzzle yourself about the process. Bible and Church say but little about processes; they deal with facts. The fact with you

is, that you want to have that miserable, haunting, guilty sense of absence from God, replaced by a real restoration to Him. The fact in the everlasting mercy of God towards the whole world, which precisely meets that want in you is, that He is in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself. A little positive and resolute faith in you will bring the want and supply together.

3. An obstacle to this reconciliation arises in the recollection of your past disobedience and present unworthiness. Granted that oneness with God would bring you peace, and that there is a way to it in the reconciliation of the Saviour, there has been a direct, personal, life-long affront on your part toward God, in all this evasion, faithlessness, and selfishness. You know enough of the relations between one person and another to understand that there must be a direct personal forgiveness of you by a personal God, before there can be open relations, or a taste of strength and gladness. Hence,

a part of the want is a want of pardon and of an *assurance* of absolution. The old score of accumulated transgression must be blotted out. One gracious stroke of forgiving Love must cut away the clog dragging at your feet. One word of power must make you whole, and turn your fear to trust. You want to be certain that for Christ's sake, God hath forgiven not only mankind at large but you. You want the Cross, and you want the comforting voice of the Church, the Body of the Lord, reiterating to you not only the promise that you *shall be* but the affirmation that you *are* forgiven and absolved, in that you believe and are washed and made a branch on the Vine.

4. But, in addition to these cravings which are subjective, having relation to internal states and satisfactions, you want the satisfaction of a right and definite position among your fellow-men, founded on these right relations with God, expressing them, openly declaring them. I think this is an almost universal desire, as

soon as any religious life springs up, forcible no doubt in proportion to the natural honesty and constitutional straightforwardness of the person. There is a great significance in it. We are not mere individuals. We are bound in with a social and corporate life by bonds and links and ties of marvelous delicacy and mysterious meaning. These ties involve our spiritual faculties and responsibilities. Neither our Christian life here nor our final salvation can be a merely individual concern. There is a Body of many members. Hence a true Christian must be a Christian before men, among men, in their face and sight. For their sake and his own he must be enrolled, and in a communion. No concealment, or ambiguity, or misconstruction, as to his place and belongings, can be tolerated. He is no true soldier who hides his colors, or thinks to fight out of line. In this world belonging to God, and with two armies occupying it, and no strip of neutral territory anywhere between them, can you

possibly treat your Maker loyally or filially without taking sides? It is a part of truth to stand aright, as well as to think and feel aright. Are you not conscious of this, and a little uneasy at your fictitious neutrality? Is not this a part of your want?

5. I apprehend that the more you reflect on the matter the more you will feel yourself in the wrong as having either believed too much or done too little. This, if you will let me say so, is a conspicuous weakness in the whole class of men to which you belong. You lack, and will not deny that you lack, consistency. As a "believer" it is impossible for you, with solid respect for yourself, or with a perfectly frank countenance before the world, to stay "indifferent." Belief in spiritual verities is of the nature of a law constraining the will, kindling the conscience, impelling the active powers. Belief in God the Father binds you to filial obedience; in the Son, to a confession and discipleship; in the Holy Spirit,

to a consecrated life — a life of prayer and advancing holiness ; in Revelation, to a practical performance of the plain requirements of the Book ; in the Church, to an explicit, acknowledged membership and a grateful reception of both of its healing sacraments. There is no stopping-place midway. Speaking well of Christianity as a civilizer, paying a parish-tax, helping to build a church, supporting or entertaining a clergyman, attending public worship, do not at all meet the demands of consistency in the case. Neglecting the most vital and most characteristic obligations of Christ's religion, and yet admitting its truths, you put yourself in an attitude that you find it utterly out of the question to defend, or even to attempt to defend. Were you to see a man, in any other department of life, going so far, in conviction and action, in expenditure and painstaking, as to provide a complete apparatus for some special operation, and then stopping short of the decisive and ultimate benefit all

along contemplated, you would apply to him names harsher than you would be ready to hear applied to yourself, even by those who, disinterestedly, watch for your soul. 'Are you sure that you would be as patient with him as Christ's ambassadors are with you? I think I have talked with hundreds of men occupying—I cannot say holding—the ground you occupy, and though I have endeavored, in every way, to draw out an intelligent definition and vindication of the position, I have never yet, in a single instance, succeeded in seeing it undertaken. It is not for me, my dear friend, to impugn your candor and honor by presuming you do not really want to be out of that unmanly compromise, on a firmer footing. Might not the thorough-going soldier, faithful in the field and faithful at the feast, say to you, "Your rock is not as our Rock, even ye yourselves being judges?"

6. There is a future. A cry not to be suppressed in your own better nature, and the solemn prophecy ringing all

through that Word of Heaven in Holy Scripture, which you say you believe, proclaim it with almost equal distinctness. Every human heart wants something very definite in order to confront "that Day."

I shall say nothing to you about the proportions of the figurative and the literal in the predictions ; for you know as well as I do that the eternal reality is not to be trifled with or covered up by any such imbecile devices. The Day will try every man's work, every man's foot-hold, of what sort it is. There must be something to hold by. A "belief" will not do it, if it is a belief too short to reach from the intellect to the heart and will.

A doctrinal theory, a pew in church, an outward conformity, handsome words about your ecclesiastical order spiced with sarcasms on the ways of your neighbors, along with a life intensely absorbed in your business, your family, your reputation, will not answer. There will shine at last a great and scorching Light, before which the secrets of all hearts will

be opened. There can be no illusion about the Right hand and the Left. Forewarnings of that separation are written all over your common scenery. The stream sweeps on. Familiar forms vanish. The graves open and close. Your body shows symptoms of wearing out. Whatever the changes may be, is there not "one thing" that is a preparation for them all, and makes a man superior to them all? Do you not *want* that? *Does your present religious condition give it to you?*

7. Suppose, finally, that as a reasonably thinking and honestly acting man, you have admitted these wants in you, dealt fairly by them, and followed their sacred leading, instead of hiding, stifling, or running away from them. The better life, born of the renewing spirit, with your consenting will, has begun. Still there is one want more. This secret, Divine life is in a human vessel and wants food, — a heavenly nourishment that it may grow thereby. Growth is its law, and if it is not fed it cannot grow ;

it cannot else but die. My friend, need I say to you that a life which only the Spirit of Christ can create or awaken, only Christ Himself can sustain? that it is by his own hand, from his own heart, in his own banqueting-house, at his own board, that the immortal refection and refreshment must be given? When it is farthest from home, the longing, famishing heart sees, half in penitential memory, and half in the expectation of faith, the "Bread enough and to spare." What comes of that vision?

LETTER IV.

THE CHOICE.

MY DEAR FRIEND: It has appeared that the first movements of spiritual life in an indifferent soul arise from the stirring of an inward sense of dissatisfaction. The diversified forms under which this feeling asserts itself in different persons, or in the same person at different times, show the extent and depth of the disorder, as well as the manifold mercy of that ever-soliciting Spirit who is so unwilling to leave us to ourselves. There is no more affecting view of our human life than that which presents it to us as a scene of this perpetual working of Divine compassion, seeking by every possible agency and avenue to enter in and rouse us from apathy, to break the sinful sleep, to open our eyes on the beauty of holiness in the

face of Christ, to unseal our ears that they may hear the voices of a higher world than this, and to draw us into the blessedness of reconciliation and communion with our Lord. The air we breathe is all quick with these gracious ministries. Till we find it out we discern only the surface, we comprehend nothing of the glory, of the common life we are living. It is but a tread-mill march, or a mere scramble of appetites, or a whirl of vulgar intoxications, or a mocking dance of illusions. Strong words are used by Holy Scripture to declare the earnest reality of this Divine solicitation, so much more merciful to us than we are to ourselves. The Spirit *strives* with man. He pleads, He presses, He teaches, He watches, He pursues, He cries, He wrestles, He agonizes, He maketh intercession with groanings that cannot be uttered. What kind of a nature must it be that can stay indifferent to a Love like that?

In most cases, under this solemn dealing with us, there is no stopping of the

stricken soul to resolve the distress into its elements. One keen, overmastering conviction of being wrong, mean, guilty, and in helpless danger takes a tremendous possession of the man. It is like a special instinct provided for the mind now awaking to the everlasting realities in which it is entangled. That soul is in its utmost peril ; of what precise evils or pains it is in peril, it does not undertake to inquire ; it is in no mood for analyzing its alarm ; it only knows that all conceivable evils are round about it, and threatening it, because it is away from God. "Lost" is the Scripture word, not a whit too vigorous for those who know anything about it. Hence the question, the New Testament tells us, that comes to the lips of a man convicted of this one supreme want—this sense of inward separation from God flashing through him—whether his outward living has been respectable or dissolute—is the question of instant danger—"What shall I do to be *saved*?" With the degree of vividness or intensity

in the conviction, as with the manner of demonstrating it, no doubt temperament, or other personal qualities, will have something to do. I only beg you to mark two things. One is that you are never to make any other man's experience, especially as to its emotional characteristics, a model or a measure for your own; incalculable mischief has been done, discouraging effort and depressing hope, by this unhealthy comparison of the mere phenomena of faith in its individual manifestations. The other is, that the experience itself — that stage of the inner progress where the soul feels and confesses its complete helplessness, insufficiency, emptiness, and knows itself to be lost without God, is an essential reality, with every soul that ever passes from unbelief or indifference to the power and peace of a union, by faith, with Jesus Christ. The study of subjective religion discovers it as a logical necessity, while all Christian biography reveals it as a spiritual fact. I need not inform you that in the Revelation which

you believe, from one end of the Bible to the other, no doctrine is clearer or more conspicuous.

At this point comes a decision. It is not enough to say that it ought to come ; it must come. Strictly speaking it is superfluous to exhort the man to decide whether he will be God's true child and servant or not ; whether he will serve God or himself, Christ or this world, the Holy Spirit or Satan. He makes that decision inevitably. I may urge him to make it on the right grounds, to make it fairly and intelligently, to make it for his eternal life, and to declare it honestly when he makes it. But make it he must. There are only two possible attitudes in which you or any man can stand toward God in Christ : one is that of union, the other of opposition ; one is that of willing, conscious, faithful, affectionate obedience, the other is that of distrust, separation, alienation. Not to be in the first is to be in the last. Neutrality is utterly out of the question, because it is incompatible with the nature of

the moral and personal relations subsisting. Towards a man you may hold a relation of indifference or moral neutrality, because the personalities are finite, and the spheres distinct. The two simply let one another alone. But God is everywhere. He creates, encompasses, preserves, commands, loves, redeems us. By no possibility can we escape these intense and intimate ties, holding us to Him. No energy, no will, no disbelief, no sacrilege, no oblivion, can set us free from the responsibility of choice. The will of the one or the other person, yourself or God, is obeyed. "He that is not with me is against me." The particular value of that state to which you have come, when your empty soul hungers and thirsts after God, conscious of the estrangement, is that it breaks up the illusory and treacherous pretense of such neutrality, teaches you that indifference means disloyalty, and moves you powerfully to choose *aright*.

If we seek the causes of this division

of the life of the moral world, and this absolute necessity of being on one side or the other, we shall find them in the fact that the Lord of all souls is one God, the discriminating law of his single Will arraying all souls in two armies, either as being in harmony with that Will, or in discord with it ; and again, on the other part, in the freedom of man. With these conditions, the more you think of it, the plainer it will become to you that to presume upon indifference as a kind of middle-ground of temporary security where you are waiting for a convenient time to make up your mind, or for some wrench in your life to take you off your feet and sweep you into the Kingdom of Heaven involuntarily, is something a great deal worse than folly. There is not a word in the Book of Life that lends any color to a sophistry like that. Mix ourselves up as we may, let the gradations in the appearances and outer details of character be what they will, the line runs out straight from the Great White Throne,

and you and I and all souls are on the right hand of it, or on the left.

This act of choice is distinct in its nature, direct in its operation, generally instantaneous, and yet is in no respect inconsistent with the laws of the rational constitution. You decide whether or not you will be Christ's man, in the same way, by the same sort of mental action, that you decide what profession you will follow, or in what country you will live. Put promptly away all those artificial representations that would envelop the matter in a maze of mystical confusion, or take it out of the range of simple, intelligible, reasonable doings. There are mysteries in religion, but not in this region of it. There are things of faith that are spiritually discerned, but this act is not one of them. Let there be no necromancy and no fanaticism beclouding the sharp question whether you will be a thorough-going, unequivocal disciple. Long trains of thought may very well go before the actual determination. The mind may

advance and recede, waver and deliberate, weigh reasons, or be swayed by passion ; but finally there is a moment when the great controversy is settled, the face is turned, the foot is planted, the will declares, " I will arise." The heart gives itself at once to the Lord, and thenceforth is more truly self-possessed, better balanced, and resting in a deeper peace, than ever before.

In one respect this decision is unlike all others, and stands alone. It comprehends the whole field of character. It is not one of a class or series of decisions. By placing you on the right side of the great line, it determines that on that side also a great many of your less-considered actions, indeed the main body of your actions, shall lie. Every-day life includes thousands of deeds which scarcely seem to have any definite moral complexion, because no specific moral motive is consciously connected with them. This Christian choice throws all these over into the sphere of dutiful obedience, because it assigns

the man himself to a dutiful position, on God's side, with godly motives. The old sacramental writers used to distinguish three of their seven sacraments as "giving character," and as "character" is indelible these were never to be repeated, namely, Baptism, Confirmation, and Orders. We may adopt the expression for that inward act of choice on which Confirmation sets the seal. If it is genuine, and intelligent as Church teaching can make it, it is very rarely, to say the least, in the normal progress of the spiritual man, to be done a second time. Once for all the younger son says, "I will arise and go to my Father." After that, the ups and downs of the homeward journey over the mountains are not very hard to bear.

You have too much good sense, I trust, to raise the cavil of human inability, and to excuse yourself from choosing, on the pretext that your business is to wait for the sovereign energy of God. No doubt, if you desire to put a metaphysical puzzle into your business of laying hold on Eter-

nal Life, this one will serve your turn as conveniently as any other. Precedents for that sort of self-stultification are not wanting. The older school of Calvinistic orthodoxy stood fast for sovereign grace in conversion ; but that system went far to sacrifice the grace to the sovereignty, limiting the Divine benevolence by the arbitrariness of the personal election. Pressed by this difficulty, the later and more liberal school ventured to escape it by saying that "the first step is man's ;" rationalizing more than they were aware, and opening a wide door to Pelagianism. Catholic doctrine has always seen the clear workings of Heavenly grace antecedent to any human choice, forever besieging the heart with the inward and outward sollicitings of the Spirit, and making man's part to consist in a simple ceasing to resist, and an opening of the door to Him who stands and knocks. The prodigal "came to himself," and "arose ;" but the power of the love and bounty in the Father's house was upon him long

before. You may arrange one class of texts attributing the whole spiritual work in the human soul to the absolute, unconditional action of the mind of God ; and over against these you may set another class equally explicit, requiring all that work of the free will of man. But an unsophisticated, candid believer makes no question at all that these diverse representations are only two hemispheres of the perfect globe of truth — two parts of a consistent whole. After we have made the most of the difficulties, we are still able to reach a practical solution, and rest in it. *We know* that God is Almighty, and the fountain of every good thing within and about us. *We know* just as well, that whensoever we will, we may give Him our hearts, and be sure that He accepts them. *We know* that we can decide, choose, turn ; and that when we have so done, it was yet God that wrought within us to will and to do, far more than we wrought for ourselves. This is enough.

It is sometimes represented, in religious

discourse, that in making the great choice, we choose between two conditions equally separate from us, and external to us. The impression is that the kingdom of Christ is as foreign to each individual as the kingdom of anti-Christ; the chooser stands apart from both, surveys them *ab extra*, and, on a cool comparison of their advantages, takes which he prefers. There is a misconception here of the economy of the Gospel, of the grace of God, of the Divine plan of the Church, and hence of the entire practical method of the Christian life, a misconception which is wide spread among modern religionists, and is disastrous in its effects. According to the Apostolic teaching, every baptized person is already within the Kingdom. Divine mercy and the faith of the Church placed him there. The shelter of the Covenant is over him. The defenses of the eternal Fold are round about him. His choice, therefore, is not between going here and going there. It is between staying and being true and faithful where he already

is — true to the blessed place and faithful to its holy obligations — and renouncing his inheritance for exile. Shall he be a filial child in that house — a loyal citizen of that Kingdom — a sound and serving member of the Body, under the life-giving Head — or shall he sink into the double guilt and deepened shame of refusing an invitation and disowning a birthright? Even if you were not made a partaker in that sacramental blessing, you still sustain a certain relation to Jesus Christ, the Lord of our race.

It is not optional with you, my friend, whether you shall live on a redeemed earth, and in times on which the ends of the age are come ; it is only optional with you *how* you shall live here. It cannot be with you as if your Saviour had not sanctified the world with his feet, and sweetened its air with his charity, and judged it by his cross. These supernatural facts are a part of the estate you occupy. Neither your ingratitude nor your caprice can root them out, or clear

you of the accountability they bind upon you. Your indifference may blind your eyes or paralyze your limbs; it does not slide you out of the range of the mediatorial ministry, or of the reckoning that must follow it. In any case, therefore, the scales of the choice do not hang evenly balanced. Your right decision is already weighted with the coming of the Son of Man. The Way of Life has his light upon it. Choose you, this day, whether you will serve, in joy, the Master of the house, or turn your back upon it, and upon Him! If you have wandered some distance away, turn you, for your place is kept for you, and you are yet within the borders of the King's country! If you have fallen into the slumber of unconcern, awake and arise, and Christ shall give you light!

Set clear of the perversions and discol-
orations of mistaken systems, the teach-
ing is wonderfully simple and wonderfully
consistent. This signal, solitary, personal
act of choice, by the catholic and evan-

gelic instruction, has its due place and proportion in the entire history of the new life—no more, no less. With the baptized it looks backward to the implanted grace and quickening life of the regeneration, and owns its seal, deriving thence secret power and the consolation of an inviolable promise—a help so sure that even Luther declares that all subsequent resolves and renewings must be traced back to Christian baptism, as they start from that. With the unbaptized it is incomplete and incongruous until the choosing soul takes its pledge, and wins its benediction, at the same cleansing font. Nor, on the other hand, are the relations of this grand decision to Christian nurture and growth and a gradual sanctification afterward, less definite. The choice determines the direction of the soul's movement, strikes away all obstructions to the impelling power of the Spirit, and places the disciple where he will receive all the holy helps and gracious nourishments provided by the Lord's hand. Inwardly, a

decisive change has come to the negligent and careless heart, which makes all things new; and the salvation, once for all obtained, is appropriated. It is an act of faith, for faith is the willingness to receive that life which Christ gives. The confession now is, "My Lord, and my God, I am thy child, thine always henceforth, thine to be fashioned and led, thine to love and serve!"

There remains a spiritual discipline under a law of spiritual increase.

LETTER V.

DISCIPLINE OF THE NEW LIFE.

MY DEAR FRIEND: Magnifying, as we ought, the importance of a definite decision of the great question, we are not to take it for more than it really is. There is a danger at either extreme. Here is one multitude missing the inestimable benefit by irresolution as to the act of laying hold of it; there is another wasting or losing it by taking the one act of choice for the whole work of life, leaning idly back on that single purpose of the mind, and behaving as if by being on the right side of the line we were released from the drill and the march, the vigil and the battle. How mournfully this twofold forfeiture reduces the ranks and limits the triumphs of the Lord's kingdom among men! What an unfathomable depth of

sadness there is in that most pathetic saying of his, "Ye will not come to me that ye might have life!" And yet while He marveled at the utter unbelief of some, He evidently looked with equal sorrow on the frail resolves and short-lived emotions of others, whose zeal was as fugitive as the morning cloud, and their penitence and piety as quick to vanish as the drops of morning dew; the workmen that looked back as soon as their hands had touched the plough, or the disciples that had no root in themselves, and so endured but for a time.

You may say, perhaps, that this relapse into indifference does not always come from moral infirmity, but that it often results from mere spiritual ignorance, or a lack of clear and firm directions as to how the resolved and started Christian should go on; and you might say this with reason. Mistaken instruction must answer for a fearful amount of effervescent religion. Sometimes the whole object of religious exhortation seems to be

to kindle up and set aglow a furnace of pious feeling without the least suggestion as to what is to be done with the heat after the flames are lighted. Sometimes a stress so *exclusive* is laid on the determination to begin the work that, after the beginning has been made, and the good part has been chosen, the beginner is utterly at loss what to do next. The first step has been taken, thanks be to God! But are there no other steps? A position has been gained. What then? What for? Beyond this first act a nebulous confusion envelops the scene. The movement slackens. A sense of disappointment creeps into the heart, and with disappointment the reaction that almost always attends a relaxing of an overwrought tension of the mental or emotional powers. Doubts are gendered. Spirits not of heaven are ready to crowd into the empty room. The world, never resting, never sleeping, never wanting in definite promises, presses hard. Old habits and passions, "scotched, not killed," reassert

their insinuating or imperious demands. The Hill Difficulty looks rather steep : is the end worth the troublesome toil, after all ? This second state of indifference is as bad as the first.

But meantime, my friend, the everlasting verities have not changed their places or lost their light. They are stars that never set or go out, whatever low-bred mists may hang about our eyes. Your Father is waiting for you ; Jesus Christ is the same ; the Holy Spirit still strives ; the deep wants of your soul are not quenched ; the Covenant is not dissolved ; the House stands with the door open and the table spread, and all the gracious nurture of the Home is prepared ; provisions are made there, not for a fickle sentiment, but for an immortal progress. No errors or failures of human teaching can alter in the least these abiding realities.

Suppose, then, the new life of personal faith and holy endeavor has been awakened and begun. Its next need is *nurture*. If it is not to perish, it must have care,

protection, nourishment, guidance. It must be treated just as all other young life is treated. There must be a complete system of training adapted to its nature, meeting all its weaknesses, exposures, and necessities, and ministering to it all that it requires, in a patient discipline for a final perfection. Of course this juvenile religious life is not able to strike out such a system for itself. It has not wisdom, strength, or experience for that. At best it is in a mortal vessel. The child never makes his school: if he could do that he would be beyond the school already. The question arises, — and it is one of unspeakable interest, — Is there any such positive system of spiritual nurture existing? Is there a place, and method, and form of that Divine training? Is there a school whose authority and love are both complete and completely harmonized? Is there a home for the Father's child, and a tuition for the Master's disciple? Must there not be? And if there is, you will say, with me, that

Heaven, and not man, must have established it. He only who made the soul, who called it to glory and immortality, and awakened it to conscious life, must have created and fashioned the plan of its education and provided for its maturing. Your own thought will anticipate what I would say, and give the only true name to the fact. It must be the Kingdom of Heaven on the earth; the Church of God in Christ; the Family of the Bridegroom and the Bride.

There, beyond all peradventure, the young life in your heart must be sheltered, and have its nutriment ministered by a higher hand than your own. There it must be glad and thankful to be, humble, teachable, diligent, obedient. If it already finds itself there by the covenant of Churchly faith enclosing you in baptism, in your childhood, it is well; it is better than you know, in many ways; for no understanding ever entirely comprehends the grace of the Sacramental mystery, any more than the other hidden

mercies of the Spirit, breathing where He listeth. Blessed are those children! Even then, however, — since you were unconscious, perhaps, and irresponsible, when those Arms wrapped their embrace of compassion about you, — you will inquire whether there is not some free, voluntary action on your own part needful to ratify and confirm, by personal self-consecration, the sponsorial vow and the charitable work of others in your behalf. The answer, if you look into your New Testament, will not be far to seek, — Revelation here, as everywhere, answering to reason while overshadowing and directing it. Baptized or not, having now chosen to take up your inheritance and follow your Lord, you have an immediate, imperative duty to discharge; and you see what it is. In the one case it is to “arise and be baptized;” in the other, it is to seek the laying on of hands, which is the voluntary consummation of the baptismal blessing, with the further gifts of the Holy Spirit attached and pledged to that effecting ordinance.

Notice that *in the very doing of this commanded act there is a supply of additional power.* We are so made that the moment we are filled with a new feeling and a new purpose, there is requisite — wherever a healthy, natural condition allows it — some overt step to be taken. Some energy must be put forth, to concentrate the subjective life and fix it as an abiding power of “character.” The earnest, ardent convert, and the more deliberate and guarded believer alike, coming to this stage of the true experience, naturally want to *do something*; to move forward; to arise and walk; to stand up for Jesus; to bear a testimony; to take an oath of allegiance and service, — the original sense of the Latin *sacramentum*. If nothing of this sort is undertaken, there is the usual danger of a passive, ebbing, disheartened sensibility. The newly-chosen walk with God becomes secure and vigorous by an outward confession and enrolment. Instead of subsiding into himself, inspecting his own

interior anatomy, and brooding over his dubious symptoms, the new man takes healthily up his proper business, and goes gladly on. He goes first where his Christian purpose will be taught for work, and fed for growth. In the practical aspect of this kind of proceeding you will be apt to find yourself intelligently interested, and your indifference giving way.

Sentimentalists, in abundance, imagining they are advocating a superior spirituality, will tell you to beware of the whole outward part of religion as a matter of surface and snare; that, despising these visible conformities and supports, you are to struggle up independently and individually, if you can, through some exercises of unregulated feeling and some groping among abstract principles, into a rarer atmosphere, or, if it might be, into a closer likeness to Christ. But you will have to meditate the matter only a little while to perceive the fallacy. In the whole range of our knowledge, in any of the kingdoms of nature, we know of

no life that does not inhabit a form and act through organs. Take the form or body, without the informing life, and you have, to be sure, only dead wood fit to be burned or a corpse fit to be buried. But take the life, if you can, without the body, and you have only sap spilt upon the ground, or a fitting ghost, spectral and evasive. All vital force needs some channel or shape to conserve it and give it instrumental value and regularity of operation. As sure as converted individuals go about to find their own ways of religious progress, there will be chaos instead of order, and apples of ashes instead of fruits of righteousness. There will be as many religions as there are people, and, after a time, not much of Christ in any of them. At any rate, the word of the Law puts the matter out of dispute. Our mortal fancy may be fertile in comparisons and "modern instances." But the command to mind the outward part is just as plain in Scripture as to mind the inward part. The same Lord who says "Repent," says also, "Be

baptized." The Saviour, who sanctifies by the Spirit, institutes a sacrament of sanctification in the Supper. Inspiration (Heb. vi.) places "the laying on of hands" side by side with "faith toward God," among essential "principles." The Gospel speaks no more explicitly of virtues and graces than it does of "the kingdom." Great care is taken, too, to pronounce the visible part to be of universal obligation, binding on "all" and "every one." Doubtless there is a gradation in these things; in a sense, one is more important than the other. But where Divine teachings are explicit, and precepts are of absolute authority, it is not for us to omit anything, or call anything superfluous, or optional.

If you have a notion that you can attain to any heights without doing exactly what God has told you to do, without entering by a visible door — putting your spiritual life to school and to practice in an instituted Church, to be nourished there just according to her divinely-ap-

pointed appliances and helps, in prayer, sanctuaries, separate seasons, sacred places, reverent observances, charitable works and ministries, holy sacraments — it is only because you have been more or less misled by a very plausible sophistry of self-direction, or infallible personal illumination. A great deal of the prevailing indifference — not all of it, but much — may be traced to the misleading of that flattering idea. The sooner you make a fair revision of the whole subject, and let good sound common-sense and a docile heart set you down at the feet of the Great Master, in his own “school,” the sooner you will be a strong soul, at peace with yourself, and a useful workman for God.

You will observe, further, how practicable and hence how animating the business of being a Christian becomes, by the orderliness and definiteness of it. Nothing is more fatal to good intentions than vagueness. We not only gain nothing by beating the air, but we disappoint and disgust ourselves. Our Lord gives

us our work in successive steps, one thing at a time. The steps may follow rapidly one after the other, but no one of them can be skipped. If you leave out the confession of Christ, and the taking of your place in his Heavenly School, there will be a defect or failure as to all that shall come after that. I may wish myself on the top of the mountain on the other side of the river. Shall I sit here wishing, or shall I step into the boat that lies yonder ready to take me across? Shall I build a dream of reaching that point *per saltum*, or shall I climb, putting one foot before another, in the mountain path? Shall I cavil because the boat is not a balloon, or because it is made of common, visible wood? God proves us first by the humility of a particular obedience. Christ required of those He healed that they should do something. The act of taking up the responsibilities of an open relation to the Church is essentially an act of faith, and hence, with the sacrifice it demands, it is a test of the *sincerity* of faith. You cannot expect

the satisfactions of the Father's house, and the "bread enough," even though you are within the borders of the King's country, till, all unworthy, you draw near and come under that roof.

Several familiar objections arise to this outward act of holy obedience, whereby you seal your choice and achieve the two-fold benefit of bearing testimony to your Redeemer and receiving the nurture and discipline of his household.

1. There is an objection on the score of belief. Men hesitate because they are not sure that they believe enough. Some men are constitutionally slower to believe than others. Men that are Thomases by temperament are to be treated with respectful sympathy, and when so treated they may become, as the gospel shows us, mighty and valiant in faith. The things necessary to be believed are, therefore, reduced in Christ's Church to the smallest possible number and the simplest possible terms. It cannot be God's intention, after planting his Kingdom on earth

by the costly sacrifices of redemption, to keep men out of it by intellectual difficulties. Having died for you, Christ will not tax you by demanding an assent to a string of metaphysical propositions such as only one man in a hundred can grasp. He asks you to believe *in Him*, a living, Divine Saviour, and in the personal and historical facts of his Mediation, with a very few of the more comprehensive truths closely related to his person, his ministry, and its consequences. This summary is the daily Declaration of the Church, in all her members, to herself, to the world, and to God. About that there is not to be a shadow of uncertainty. Whatever is beyond that is doctrine not essential to membership, or to beginning, but may be learned in the discipline, and by doing the will, afterward.

2. Other objectors plead a defect of feeling. There is, of course, such a defect. But you will remember that neither the Bible nor the Church has laid down any gauge of the precise amount of re-

ligious emotion necessary for being a branch on the Vine, and that our emotional nature is one of the most changeable and indeterminate elements in us, being largely influenced by temperament, by passing occasions, by physical states, by natural and unnatural stimulants. One of the prime absurdities of untaught teachers is to be perpetually telling their hearers to *feel more* about religion, when the more they try to directly force themselves to feel, the less the right feeling comes. The fact is, in all the great acts of life we have to subordinate mere feeling to conviction, impulse to principle, lively sensibilities to a law of right, and, provided we have just feeling enough to begin a commanded work honestly, we are to make the beginning. Put yourself directly where God has told you you ought to be, and then you will be in a position where the touching and inspiring objects *which naturally rouse devout emotions* will exert their power. Instead of waiting to feel more before you act at all,

bestir yourself to act as you are, and your indifferent heart will be like coals of dulled fire under a rising wind. You lament that you feel too little hatred of sin and too little love of God. Shall I so mock and insult you as to assure you that you feel enough, or that you may put your sluggish spirit at ease? God forbid! I only bid you in the name and after the teaching of the Saviour, to take some humble courage to come nearer to Him, and to let the fact that you have *feeling enough to own your want of feeling*, drive you to the promises, and so save you from despair.

3. If this is Christ's word to hearts of defective sensibility, He speaks very much the same word to those that excuse themselves for fear that their general religious attainments are too little. Little enough they are, with the best of us. How are they to be made larger? By ourselves, or by our Lord? If by Him, how but by his own appointed way, in his own appointed place? The question is not

how much of a Christian you are, but whether you are earnestly desirous and deliberately resolved to be a Christian at all. If so, then you must be, as soon as possible, where and where only the blessed and glorious result can be gained. Starving, you must creep to the table ; freezing, you must approach the fire ; ashamed of your ignorance, you must sue for admission to the school. Proper respect must be paid to any timid apprehension that the honor of the Body of Christ will suffer damage from an inconsistent member : but that must not blind us to the other dishonor of holding back from Him a confession that is his due. We are not to chide the modesty which dreads to make a vow that may possibly be broken ; but neither are we to conceal the assurance that to those who go straight forward strength and support shall be given, of which they know nothing who have not made the venture and the trial of faith ; nor are we to call that self-distrust which is really distrust of God. We

may recognize some moral integrity in a diffidence that shrinks from the responsibility of a public commital ; but why not consider whether there is not a responsibility quite as awful in leaving undone what the Almighty has ordered us to do, especially when He declares that if we do not confess Christ before men Christ will not confess us before the Father ?

I do not expect of you such a frivolous pretext as that you do not call Christ Master because you have seen so many men call him Master, and then go back to live mean, selfish, unclean, unjust lives in the world. Pride and self-approval frequently have as much to do with that excuse as any scruple of conscience ; nor would the treachery or backsliding of all the world change by a hair's breadth the relations and duties of your single soul to God now or in the last judgment.

You are not paltry enough, I am sure, to refuse your allegiance to Christ, once seeing it to be due, because it will cost you a denial of some pleasures and van-

ities of the senses and a crucifixion of some of the fierce ambitions of the mind. Indifference is not cowardice. And even if you look no higher than the personal satisfactions to be obtained, it must have occurred to you that you will find more than a recompense for any sacrifice of earthly delight in the honorable liberty and joy of a clean and unambiguous stand on the side and under the banner of Him in whom you "believe."

Look the objections fairly in the face. Having met them and dealt with them in detail, consider whether they are fit to stand between you and the future growth of your spiritual life in the nurture and discipline of the Fold of Christ, who has so loved you as to give Himself for you. Once within that Fold, and close to Him, it will appear that *there is the place of holy work as well as of refreshing rest*, of giving as well as of receiving, of service for man as well as of praise and prayer to God, of the nobleness of charity no less than of the cheerfulness of hope and

the peace of faith. It remains, therefore, in one letter more, to mark the course of the growing Christian's increase in holiness toward the measure of the stature of the perfect man.

LETTER VI.

THE LAW OF SPIRITUAL INCREASE.

MY DEAR FRIEND: The Christian life would be a more attractive thing if the lives of Christians were less dull. We are all impressed by signal manifestations of vital power; and the higher the kind of power, the deeper and grander the impression. I suppose one prolific source of religious indifference is that those who appear to the world as representatives of religion have but a meagre and timid apprehension of the principle of *perpetual growth* inherent in the Christian faith. It is not that they are insincere, in belief or feeling, but that they take the Christian privilege for a much less glorious thing than it is, and misconceive its mightiest law. They exhibit it as negative, when it really is positive; as attained and com-

passed by a single experience of conversion, whereas that is only the outset of an unceasing progress; and as a condition of stationary security instead of a constant production of holy uses and manifold forms of good. "Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit;" and if the Father is thus glorified, so also his cause, his kingdom, and his personal service. Were the Church as alive in its membership as it is in its living Head, — were it a body of thoroughly roused, intensely earnest, forward-pushing men — men on whom the signet of their consecrated calling were visibly stamped, men having their conversation, in a true sense, in heaven, and all the more serviceable in this world because always acting as having a commission and an errand for the other, never counting themselves to have apprehended, but always reaching on; — then who could calculate the energy of its movement? Would it not irresistibly sweep into its majestic lines multitudes now uncon-

cerned? This engaging and inspiring influence on unbelievers of a spiritual life ever cumulative and ever advancing might well be presented oftener than it is as a practical argument for greater Christian activity, and as a motive for missionary zeal. Indifference begets indifference, — yielding after its kind. I will give you the credit of presuming that possibly your own lack of interest may be partly owing to a prevalent but depressing idea that the act of accepting Christ's invitation and putting on his badge exhausts the stress of his demands, and as good as finishes the business of becoming a Christian.

The error inflicts, in fact, a double damage. On the one hand, with some minds, it creates a sense of unreality, repelling rather than animating any generous aspiration. In other quarters, it produces a wrong estimate of the requirements for taking a clear Christian position, in the good confession of baptism and confirmation, and discourages from that duty. If a single step — silently reasons

the perplexed and diffident inquirer — is so all-inclusive in its moral magnitude, if it is not only the first essential thing, chief in significance and chief in its challenge to courage, but so exhaustive in its character as to fill the field of vision and leave very little to be done afterward for the full keeping of Christ's commands, why, then there must be some extraordinary prerequisite; there must be certain singular, abnormal, interior exercises: sincere sorrow for sin and faith in the Lord and his cross cannot be enough. I might be ready to make a beginning, but I cannot make an end at the same moment; I find conversion is pushed out of the rank of practicable undertakings; I must wait a great while before I commit myself to a profession like that. On that theory it will not be strange if misgivings and excuses without should make many empty places within; if the company of those who dare to come and sit as learners and followers at the Saviour's feet should be very select indeed; and if the princi-

pal employment of the venturesome few should consist in self-congratulation at having escaped the things behind, rather than in the self-forgetful and loyal doing of a work for Christ, lying at hand and stretching before. Never present to yourself the act of conversion, I beg you, as a leap *out of* the field of action, or a release from the necessity of exertion, but exactly the contrary. We are not awakened to lie down, or confirmed to stand still. Accustom yourself to regard this great change in a more stimulating light. Take it as just getting into a position to receive ever-renewed gifts from God, and to do nobler labors for Him. Look at it as an equipment for a service of charity and prayers yet scarcely begun ; the clearing up of confused relations with eternity ; the joyous acceptance of a heritage where the blessedness will lie in boundless opportunities of disinterested work, with love for the motive, and endless supplies of strength from the Beloved for the reward, and the communion of pure souls,

ever ascending into loftier holiness, because ever "growing up in all things into Him," for the refreshment. Will "indifference" to a calling, a career, a destiny, like that be possible?

You can be troubled by no serious doubt that this is the real nature of the Christian life, as to its beginning and its course, when you turn from the one-sided schemes of scholastic and sentimental system-makers to the strong Scriptures of truth. To quote their solid array of explicit and literal statements, standing all along the pages of the New Testament, affirming the law of spiritual increase and spiritual fruitage, and binding it upon each disciple, would but very imperfectly exhibit the strength of the doctrine. It is incorporated into the whole evangelic structure, it is inwoven into the texture of the New Economy, in its implications, allusions, personal biographies, sacramental significations, and all its practical helps. Beginning and progress, birth and growth, believing and living, are

never for an instant confounded with each other. The steps never interfere. The order is never disturbed. "As ye have, therefore, received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in Him," might be taken as the solemn superscription of every epistle. In all places where they are planted, the young Churches are addressed as being made up of persons in whom a certain movement of Divine life has been begun, but not matured, with a great deal yet to do, and a great deal to undo: graces to be gained, and faults to be fought down; knowledge to be patiently acquired, and active force to be indefinitely enlarged; Christians to be fed, that they may grow — ministered to, that they may be built up — "called to be saints," indeed, because they believe, and because their relationships and aims are holy, but with a saintship inchoate, as it were; sure in its root, magnificent in its anticipations, and yet beholding the greater glory to be revealed only through a perspective of greater self-denials to be borne, and

greater toils to be accomplished. We see the same law continually recognized in the Saviour's recurring references to the analogy of the seed, the plant, and the corn, and in the exalted standard of unattained righteousness that He always keeps flying like a celestial oriflamme before the eyes of his disciples. We find it illustrated in the characters of the men He first called and gathered about Him. They are always advancing from a feeble outset to self-mastery of exceeding dignity and splendid triumphs of martyr-endurance and martyr-trust, ready to be offered at the end of a finished course. And thus we discover the life of God in the soul of man to be equally simple in its early motions, steady in its subsequent workings, and sublime in its immortal issues.

Indeed, the very name we give it, calling it a "life," which is Christ's own name for it, contains a confession of its natural ordination to grow. The universe offers no example of an organic existence remaining stationary or motionless.

Causes that produce inertia or restrict movement produce deformity, disease, and, finally, disorganization or death. All we know of moral life makes its preservation dependent on its activity, and, in finite natures, on its increase. Taking it in its elements, our acquaintance with men teaches us that this is true of each separate spiritual grace or virtue. Unless there is growth in faith, purity, forbearance, self-control, self-sacrifice, there is going on a process of decline.

But far more conclusive than observation, or philosophy, or analogy, is the character of the source from which this life is drawn. It is the life of Christ Himself, indwelling, in whom is all the fullness of the living God. We receive of Him grace upon grace, being made, through our union with Him, partakers of the Divine nature. There can be no limit, cessation, abridgment, or pause in this living of Christ within us, except by a contradiction of Him, or death. Till the measure of the mortal stature is filled

with Him ; nay, till the mortal measure itself is exchanged for the celestial, and that also receives of his fullness, there must be a “daily increase in his Holy Spirit, more and more.”

In a single view, even the most comprehensive, it would not be possible to observe all the characteristic features of this progressive sanctification. A few may be noted, and this will contribute to the completion of the subject.

1. One invariable mark of increasing spiritual vitality will be a more habitual consciousness of an intimate relation to the person of Christ. At first, the soul is constrained to its homeward striving and its choice of the better part by a sense of want, which, as we have seen, while it is very real, and of a Divine origin, is somewhat indefinite. The mind is guided largely by an external authority. It is convinced that all good lies in the direction it is taking. It asks what it shall do to be saved or safe, and is answered, and it understands that the answer proceeds

from the Son of God. But these are not the higher states or riper stages of a Christian's experience. They are not meant to be entirely satisfactory. As you go on, you learn that both the new life and the satisfaction of it comes from a personal Friend. Abstraction, generalities, rational inferences as to what is right, human persuasions, occupy relatively less room in your mind. To speak of the importance of religion, the truth of Christianity, the assuming of religious responsibilities, would be to deal in phrases correct enough in their way, no doubt, but weak as expressions of what is going on and growing up within you. As your thoughts are more with the Son of Man in his ministry, his suffering, his glory, your inner life will take on a peculiar freshness, vigor, and reality. You will think less of his particular offices, perhaps, than of Him ; less of his exactions than of his affections. Your times of devout retirement will be like dialogues with Him. His words and ap-

pointments will be precious as cords and stays drawing you to Himself, and making you at home there. You will ask yourself, in doubtful matters or places, how this or that would suit his mind, or harmonize with his presence. Not that his visible presence, or any strained attempt to realize it, will be needful. The Apostles, when writing to the Churches and preaching the Gospel, seem to have had as quick and clear a sense of his being with them as if they were in the group at Bethany, or in the upper chamber at Jerusalem. Yet there will be an increased feeling of his being really close at hand, and his face, marvelous in its tenderness, is almost seen. Doubtless it is for this reason that, in the more advanced and thoroughly-disciplined frames of true spirituality, there is a genuine desire for more frequent communions at the Supper, quite removed from all affectation or fanaticism. All this, too, is far apart from those excited visions and familiar appeals to the Saviour which sometimes accom-

pany overwrought religious demonstrations, and render them in their unreality specially disgusting. It is the calm and blessed fruit of long-continued watching and holy endeavor where the noise and surface agitations of an eager, secular world have less and less part to play, and where a hallowed nurture at the foot of the altar, in the stillness of the closet, and commonly under the shadow of some sorrow, has chastened and tranquillized the spirit till it not only dwells with Christ, but hides itself in Him.

2. As the better life deepens and expands, there is also a steady alteration in the relative proportions of fear and love, as motive-powers in Christian living. The fear will not totally vanish, even in the highest type of piety; but it will become that confiding and reverential fear which is in accord with the sweetest filial affection. The love will not wax overbold or presumptuous, so as to forget the line that runs between things allowed and things forbidden; but it will set the

heart at liberty from bondage, and make obedience free-footed and joyous. Ebal and Gerizim do not forsake their seats. But whereas the man just shaking himself clear of his old life will often be found saying, "*Must* I do this?" or, "What will happen to me if I do not?" — doing some good things only because of a threat of evil if they are left undone, — the more mature disciple will rather move forward to the duty or the sacrifice with an unquestioning conviction, — which in fact shuts every question up, — that there God will be with him, and hence he cannot go elsewhere. His soul is so affianced to righteousness that, in the instinct of a nobler nature, he recoils from known sin as ordinary men shun dishonor. In fact, sin becomes a dishonor to the Best Friend. Law remains, though liberty is gained, for law and liberty are not opposites; the slavery of self-will is the real antagonist of law, as license is the foe of liberty. And therefore it is one of the signs of a spirit that has risen well up toward over-

coming the world, when the will spontaneously acts so much in line with the will of God that there is no galling of the neck under the yoke, and but little calculation of the consequences of disobedience. Believe, my friend, in this oneness of purpose and life with God ; pray for it as a part of the Christian victory, and expect it as a part of the Christian sanctification.

3. Along with the reconciliation of duty with inclination, there comes a reconciliation of small and even comparatively insignificant duties with the great principles of Christian allegiance. I scarcely know a surer test of real growth into Christ than this, — a more infallible touchstone to distinguish a true advance in holiness from the higher life of mere sentimentalism. Something is wrong where claims to exalted spirituality, or to a superior freedom from temptation, even though it be attributed to the special power of Jesus Christ, are accompanied by no corresponding deliverance from

petty domestic foibles, from ill-temper, vanity, obstinacy, contempt of those that differ, or indolence. The grandeur of a triumphant faith is in the uniformity of its operation, in its easy condescension to homely drudgeries, in the quiet self-sacrifice with which it takes the stumbling-blocks and the burdens from others' paths and shoulders, in the Christlike lowliness that renders the hour with God on the mountain-top not an excuse for neglecting common-place services to our neighbors but a secret preparation for their more punctual and faithful performance. Too many old habits, to be sure, cling about our crude beginnings of the new life to allow this divinest beauty of holiness to appear at once. But it is capable of indefinite unfolding and brightening. As sure as Christ is formed in you, it will glorify all your manhood. Is there nothing inspiring in that certainty? Add to this another practical aspect of this service, as the Church in its purity holds it, although a perverted religionism has fear-

fully obscured it, namely, that ceaseless and systematic works, by every Christian, for his brother-man, are just as truly a part of the fruits of his faith as inward purification, and will not the way of life look to you the way of light? Is it in a lofty style of humanity to be indifferent to it?

4. Another mark of the increase of the blessed life of Christ in the disciple is an increase of serenity. Agitations belong to earlier periods; the slender stream is tossed about and troubled by trivial impediments, frets at every little roughness on its edges, bubbles and babbles at the stones in its bed, and even seems to foam sometimes at sudden accessions to its own fullness. But running on its way it gathers contributions to its force. Gaining volume and depth it gains tranquillity. Slight hindrances are borne silently away before its strength, and it moves in majesty because its motion is undisturbed. So a German saint, describing in his diary the later results of a long spiritual con-

flict, the final issue of a slow inward struggle, borrows Isaiah's image, and says, "Now was my peace like a river." The anxiety of religious beginners is of many kinds. There is the anxiety of crude ideas, of undisciplined emotions, of morbid introspection, of comparison with others, of fear for the future, and distrust of God. In a true, healthy growth, under the Divine nurture of God's House, you see less and less of this spiritual worrying. In the character of Jesus Christ nothing is more marvelously beautiful than the peace; and, in the things of the Spirit, peace comes by power. The more He gives us of his life, the more He gives us of his repose. To a large extent this peace consists in a superiority to the irritations and annoyances of our common lot, as well as to its heavier sorrows. In respect to the former, we call it patience, which is sublime, in God and in man. In the latter, we call it submission. In the case of some eager, impetuous, and yet sensitive natures, it requires a long

practice and ripe attainments to be patient with one's self, — almost as much as to be submissive to God. This evil spirit of unrest cometh not forth except by prayer and fasting; but when it is gone, a singular loveliness is seen on the face of the healed soul, and you confess that the power which, even in a lifetime of holy discipline, can work out a transfiguration so glorious, must be no other than the power of the Son of God.

5. In nothing, however, is the Christian's progress in holiness more signally manifest than in his prayers. They become more and more the natural expression of the new life. At first, prayer is either a part of the exercise of religious obedience or else the indispensable means of obtaining some desired benefit. Accordingly, persons immature in faith and love have a great deal of difficulty with their prayers. No complaint is oftener poured into the ears of spiritual pastors and teachers than that of unsatisfactory devotions. It takes different forms. Some-

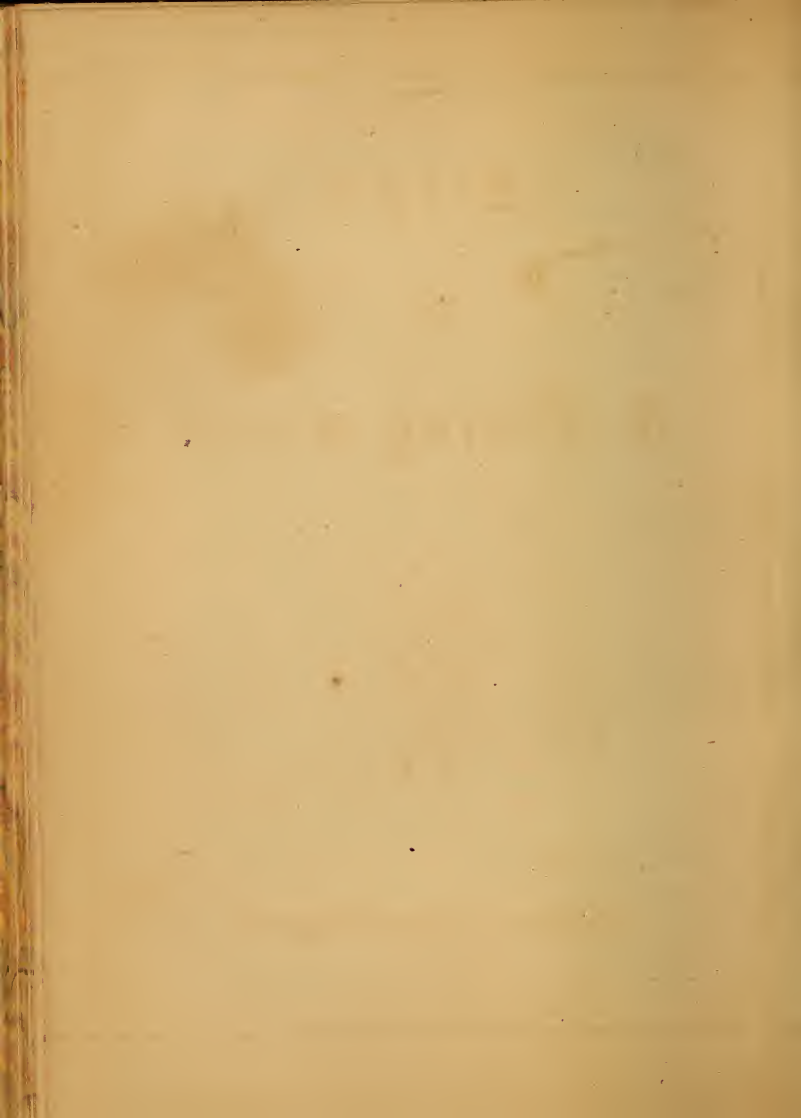
times the heart is cold ; the hour of daily retirement is unwelcome ; the closet has no attractions ; the words are nothing but words ; the whole transaction is a dead form, or even a mockery. At other times the disappointment is that the special petitions are apparently not answered. Again and again the cry goes up, and no evident sign is given of a hearing God. The request is not granted ; the bad habit is not broken ; temptation does not die ; doubt is not removed ; the favor sought is not bestowed ; the comfort is not felt, and it is questioned whether the Comforter himself draws near ; it is as if the supplication were driven back from a shut up heaven and fell like a leaden weight upon the breast. The baffled suppliant keeps on entreating, rather because the letter of the command is plain, or because he knows it must somehow be well for him to be on his knees before his Maker, than because he is refreshed. With the increase of life these sources of misery disappear ; or, if they are after-

ward reopened, the distress is short-lived, being generally due to some temporary disorder of the inward man. Christ being more completely formed within, the believer's seasons of communion with the Father spread themselves more widely through his days and nights. He passes very frequently, almost unconsciously, and by imperceptible gradations of feeling, from his ordinary existence among the things of this world into direct converse with that Friend who is ever nearest, while also most high and most mighty. The current of adoring thought flows on in joyous, satisfying concord with the Eternal Will. We do not stop, perhaps, to shape every aspiration into articulate speech, but we yield to the Divine breath, and move whithersoever the Spirit that maketh intercession moves. In such measure as may be, the disciple is in the Mount with the Master. Those wonderful words of the Communion Office are realized, "That we may evermore dwell in Him, and He in us." As the Lord

Himself sometimes, to the very last, offered up particular entreaties, so it will daily be with his most spiritually-minded followers. But the communion will not end with these. A larger and larger share of devotion will consist in thanksgiving and praise, — a sure mark of spiritual growth. Some new blessing, — a victory of faith, a fresh beam of light falling from heaven on the path, — will as often stir the soul to its heavenly conversation as a trial, loss, or throb of pain. There will be no anxious concern about answers, for the felt blessedness of the act is itself an answer. There is no doubt that God will hear, because it is known that He listened before his child called. May not something like this be the meaning of the prayer that is “without ceasing?” It is as Mr. Coleridge strikingly said, the loftiest action of the spirit of man. It is hiding in the pavilion of the Most High, and resting under the shadow of his wings. I do not believe you will always be “indifferent” to the greatness of the action, or the stillness of the rest.

My dear friend, I have gladly responded to your candid questions, endeavoring, without assumption, to comfort and help you, as the Church of God comforts and helps her children. If I have come short of the scope of your inquiry, or gone beyond it, I am sure you will pardon me, for the love I bear you. One is your Master, even Christ. Turn from all other leaders to Him. Go to Him by the old and everlasting way. Try all teachers by Him, and by the rule of the Faith once for all delivered to the saints. Be true to yourself. And I am persuaded that you will yet be found not only believing but alive in your faith, and heartily confessing that nothing is able to separate you from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

I am, most cordially and affectionately
your fellow disciple, F. D. H.

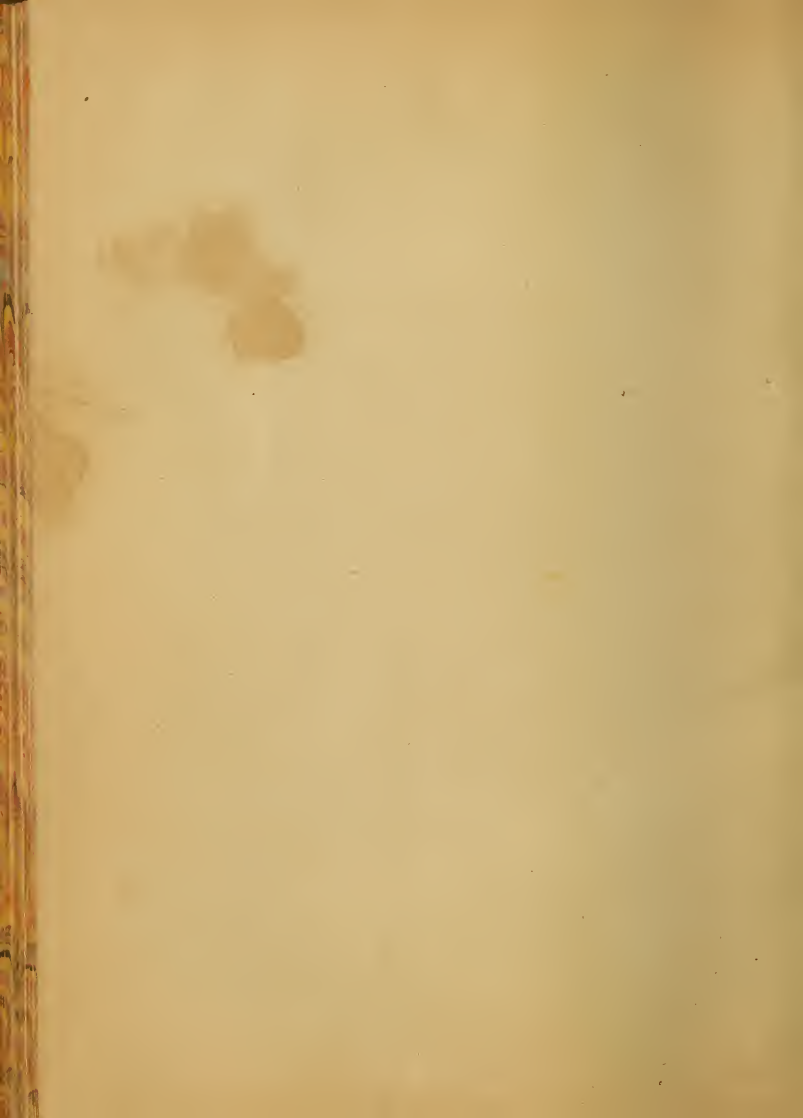


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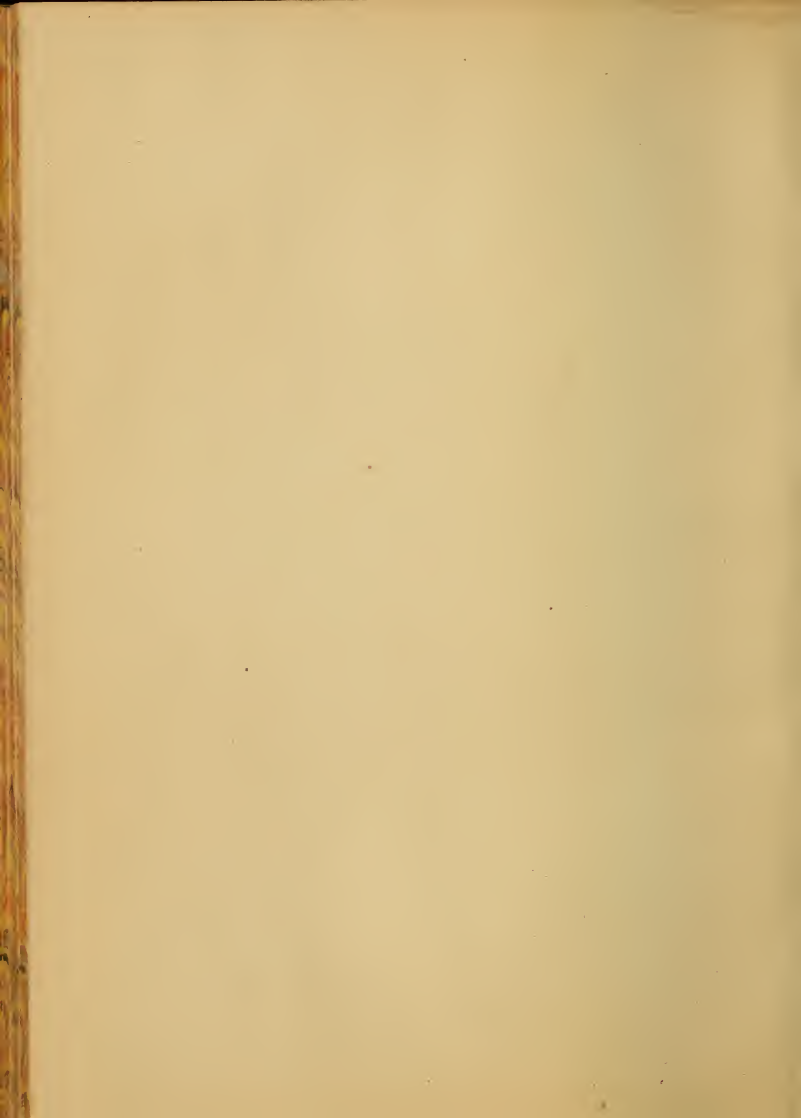
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